

# 108 Years Ago: The Arnold Laboratory at Brown Breaks Ground

## *Dr. Oliver H. Arnold funded lab, the precursor to today's medical school*

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PROVIDENCE – James Walter Wilson (1896–1969) was a freshman at Brown University in 1914 when the Arnold Biological Laboratory began construction, with funds donated by **DR. OLIVER H. ARNOLD**, class of 1865.



Vintage photo of The Arnold Laboratory on Waterman Street, a Colonial Revival style edifice designed by the architectural firm of Clarke & Howe.

Wilson would later rise to the position of chairman of the Dept. of Biology, which he held from 1945–1960. In the December 1960 issue of the *Brown Alumni Monthly*, Professor Wilson wrote that Dr. Arnold was a member of the Visiting Committee of the biology department, and related the following anecdote:

*The late President Faunce liked to tell how an unannounced visitor arrived at his office one day and had a little trouble getting past his secretary. He had come to tell Prexy that he wanted to give Brown money for a lab. The donation was about \$85,000...*

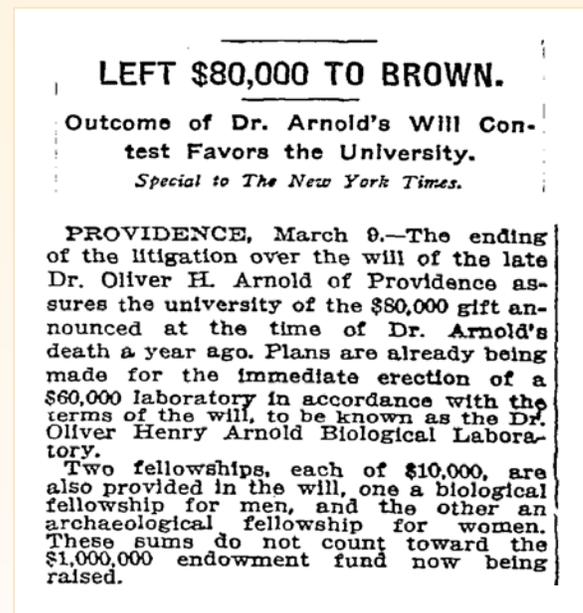
In a later Brown annual report, President Faunce described Dr. Oliver this way:

*The story of Dr. Arnold's life, so simple, frugal and obscure, but cherishing a great vision, is fascinating indeed. His rise from poverty to affluence, his devotion to his patients, largely in the rural regions around Providence, his scientific enthusiasm, which led him to drop all practice and spend the years 1883–85 in Vienna, Berlin, London and Glasgow (while Mrs. Arnold was studying Semitic languages with famous German professors), his shy-broaching of his purpose to build the laboratory, his pride and pleasure in working out the details of his gift, all these are the elements in a deeply interesting career, so quiet that our Faculty did not know of his Existence...*

A biographical sketch of Dr. Arnold in the 1891 *History of Providence County, RI*, by Richard M. Bayles states that Dr. Arnold received his medical degree from Harvard in 1867, whereupon he “began the practice of medicine at Pawtucket, with Doctor Charles F. Manchester, with whom he remained about four years, having also been a student of Doctor A. H. Okie, of Providence. He continued the practice of his profession from that time to 1883 alone.

“In the summer of 1883 he went to Europe, and remained there two years, traveling, and studying in the hospitals of London, Glasgow, Paris and Vienna, most of the time in the last mentioned place. On his return in 1885 he located in Providence, where he still continues. He was married in 1868, to Emma Josephine Ayer, of Providence. He has had a large and successful practice as a physician.”

Dr. Arnold died in 1911. The terms of Dr. Arnold's will left \$60,000 for the laboratory, \$10,000 for a biological fellowship, \$10,000 for an archaeological fellowship, dedicated to the memory of his wife, in the Women's College, and \$5,000 for three Women's College scholarships. ❖



This brief article appeared in the *New York Times* in 1912. The Arnold Laboratory at Brown University on Waterman Street was built in 1915 for \$80,000. It provided offices for five professors and later, in 1938, the auditorium on the first floor became a biological sciences library, and three laboratories were installed. Eventually it housed the administrative offices of the medical school.